# IN THE OFFICE AT POULTRY PRODUCERS

Alta Johnson Mariola

as told to Maxine Kortum Durney, Petaluma, April 10, 1989.
Revisions and additions, October 24, 1989, and January 13, 1990.

My parents came from Sweden, my mother from Gottenberg, but I don't know about my father..

My mother {Emma Landgran} came to this country with a friend, and worked in a boarding house in Denver. She met my father {John Malcolm Johnson} in Denver, where they were married, and then came to Petaluma, arriving with 75 cents between them.

My father had been in the U.S. for seven years, had returned once to Sweden to visit his family, and at that time changed his name from Erickson to Johnson to escape draft into the Swedish army.

Ours was the first place on McDowell Rd, East of the railroad crossing immediate to Corona Road. We were next door to the Hansens, and our cousins, the Petersens were on Corona Road across from the Corona Club House. (for Petersen, see also Tom Gregory, History of Sonoma County with biographical sketches. Historic Record Co. L. A. 1911)

My Dad, a charter member of Poultry Producers, had been doing well in the chicken business, when his brother came and said to him, "You are right here by the railroad; why don't you get your grain in bulk? You could get it by the carload." My father built a larger building to receive the feed, and it was a money loser for us.

George McNear foreclosed, but he gave my mother enough money - $500.00 - to make a down payment on a place in town. My mother always had great respect for the McNears.

We paid $2500 in 1928 for the place in town, 720 Bodega avenue, where I live now. I was 12 when my father died.

I went to Cinnabar School, then later to Washington Grammar.

After High School I worked at a variety store, Ben Franklin (about where Salvation Army store is now, on Petaluma Boulevard).

In 1935 I learned to candle eggs at Nye and Nissen, and wasn't paid for learning. In 1937 I went to Poultry Producers, where I candled eggs until 1944, then went into the office, to figure egg tags. I liked math, could add up the tags in my head; didn't use a machine.

Sam Smith was manager in the beginning when there was only one building. Later when there were two buildings, Sam was manager of the egg department and Paul Frederickson was manager of the feed department. Prior to the time of closing the plant, in 1978, Mr. Berven headed the egg department, and Paul continued to the last with the feed department. That department continues now in Ripon, under another name.

Later I was in egg sales, making out the invoices for the egg trucks, for their sales. I'd call and get orders - San Francisco, Marin, Concord, Santa Rosa, Fort Bragg, Willits.

The prices were subject to change, they let us know from the head office what the prices were to be for the day. Then in later years, different stores were granted different prices, according to volume. Our salesmen went out, would give a store a break if the store were going to advertise. If it did advertise we had to find the ad, we had all these newspapers around that we had to search. If there were an ad, we gave that store 2cents off per dozen, or whatever the salesman had agreed to.

I was in the office (1944) when the egg candlers struck . They were members of the Butchers' Union. Farmers and their wives came in to do the work.

Men on the platform, men in the feed department, and truckers, were all in Teamsters.

After the War the office workers unionized. Two men who had been in the service, came from the East Coast, worked in our office. They were Joe Schwartz and Don Camilli, and they were disatisfied with our wages in the office. They organized a strike, it lasted a day or two, and I picketed. I can remember Marguerite Trenam was on the picket line. Her father-in-law was our boss. We joined an office worker's union from New York, CIO, but later backed out when we went to meetings and learned it was a radical union.

We changed to the Teamsters Union, who also organized the two other big offices in town: Petaluma Cooperative Creamery, and Nielsen Freight Lines.

Poultry Producers handled sales of meat birds as well. Farmers would bring in their live, culled hens; the birds were hung on a conveyor belt, their throats were cut, they bled, and then the pickers removed their feathers. This was called "New York dress". The birds were put into cold storage, and sold to the San Francisco market.

It was interesting to watch the poultry auctions that occured later. Farmers brought in their birds, in coops, and

sold them at auction. The auctioneers came up from San Francisco.

The move of the candling plant to San Leandro came in 1957. Stanford Research Institute had determined that an automated plant in San Leandro would be more efficient and it would be more central to activities all over California, including Turlock where there were many chicken ranches.

With the move to San Leandro all local candlers were let go, however they were given a chance to transfer to San Leandro, and a few did commute.

It was the beginning of automation, but automation wasn't perfected. Checked eggs (eggs with broken shells) got in with the good eggs. Our product was no longer perfect.

Nor did SRI take into account wage increases. At first there was a lower wage scale in San Leandro, but soon there was a strike and wages went up.

Also, SRI did not take into account the fact that the product was perishable, that eggs break. Small trucks would pick up cases from the Petaluma farmers, bring them to the plant in Petaluma where they were loaded into big trucks that took them to San Leandro for candling, and then brought back for distribution to stores in this area. This double handling made more breakage.

Later, Poultry Producers brought some kinds of equipment back to Petaluma, and hired back a few people - six or seven- to grade Petaluma eggs.

I remained in egg sales (working under Mr. Berven, a fine man) until the plant closed in 1976. I had been there since 1937, 39 years. Only one person worked for Poultry Producers longer than I did and that was John Klemenok. He was there over forty years as a truck driver.

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"History of Sonoma County California"
Volume 2 Illustrated, Pg. 717
Honoria Tuomey
The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago-San Francisco-Los Angeles - 1926.

John M. Johnson:

John M. Johnson has performed well his part in life and it is a compliment worthily bestowed to say that his locality is honored in his citizenship, for he has achieved definite success; through his own efforts and is thoroughly deserving of the proud title of self-made man.

Mr. Johnson was born in Sweden, August 30, 1869, and was there educated. He immigrated to the United States and in 1888 came to Petaluma, for seven years being employed at day wages. He then returned to his native country, where he remained for three years, but the lure of the western continent was upon him and he again came to the United States. He first stopped in Illinois, where he spent six weeks, and then went to Denver, Colorado, where he remained for one and a half years. About that time he was married, having then a capital of eighty dollars, but soon afterward, when he arrived in Petaluma again, his sole possessions were a wife and thirty-five cents. Nothing daunted, he went to work for John May, at one dollar a day and board. He was energetic, and Mr. May, being impressed with his industrious habits and high character, loaned him money with which to start out on his own account. Renting a ranch, he managed so well that he cleared eighteen hundred dollars his first year. He then rented an additional thirty acres and in a few years prospered to such a degree that in 1905 he was enabled to buy twenty acres on the Mc Dowell Road. To the improvement and cultivation of this tract he at once applied himself and soon had a fine house built and other substantial and convenient improvements made. He runs about four thousand hens and also operates a brooder, raising chicks to the pullet stage, when he sells them, and he puts several thousand pullets on the market every year.

Mr. Johnson was married to Miss Emma Lungren, who came from Sweden to this country in her girlhood. To them have been born the following children: Ellen, the wife of Walter Jensen, who runs a hatchery at Tomales, and they have one child; Hilda, the wife of Ralph Church, who runs a dairy farm at Two Rock, and they have two children; Hjalma, aged twenty-one years; Malcolm, aged nineteen years; and Esther, Emma, Stanley and Alta. Mr. Johnson is a republican in his political views and fraternally is a member of the Fraternal Order of Eagles. He is a member of the Sonoma County Farm Bureau and is deeply interested in every agency for the advancement of the poultry interests of the county. He is always ready to support with influence and means all progressive measures for the betterment of the community welfare, and because of his success and his friendly disposition he enjoys the unstinted good will and friendship of those who know him.

PETALUMA HISTORICAL MUSEUM
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PLACE Petaluma

DATE 10-11-90

Alta Marsola
(Interviewee)

Nasim Darney
(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Family History Questionnaire

| | Name | Birthdate | Birthplace | Deceased? Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parents* | Emma Johnson | 1874 | Sweden | ✓ 1949 |
| | John Johnson | 1870 | Sweden | ✓ 1929 |
| Brothers & Sisters | Ellen Jensen | 1899 | Petaluma | ✓ 1983 |
| | Hilda Church | 1901 | Petaluma | ✓ 1981 |
| | Hjalmar Johnson | 1903 | Petaluma | ✓ 1927 |
| | Malcolm Johnson | 1906 | Petaluma | ✓ 1957 |
| | Esther Hallenbramps | 1908 | Petaluma | ✓ 1956 |
| | Emma Wilfert | 1910 | Petaluma | ✓ 1956 |
| | Stanley Johnson | 1912 | Petaluma | ✓ 1985 |
| Grand-parents* | — | | | |
| | — | | | |
| | — | | | |
| | — | | | |
| Spouse | Charles Mariola | 1911 | Italy | — |
| Children | — | | | |
| Grandchildren | — | | | |

*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name Mariola Alta
Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 720 Bodega Ave.
Petaluma, Ca 94952

Marital status: Married ✓ Single ___ Divorced ___ Widowed ___

Birthdate 3-30-16 Birthplace Petaluma

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) 74 years

Education: Elementary school (Cinnabar) + Washington Grammar

Secondary school Petaluma High Grad 12

College — Grad —

Other —

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) Clerk, egg candler + office worker

Travels (Caribbean, Alaska, Canada, New England states, Hawaii and other states)

Organizations, clubs Bowling 500 Club + Autumn Leaves Senior Club

Other special interests Golf, walking for exercise, reading, knitting, crocheting and gardening

Additional comments

THANK YOU!